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SUBJECT: CEEAC, AN EVOLVING REGIONAL ORGANIZATION, ASSUMES CONTROL OF PEACEKEEPING IN CAR

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Classified By: CDA Nathan Holt for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS/CEEAC) took over responsibility for a small EU-funded peacekeeping operation in the Central African Republic (CAR) on July 12. The handover was a milestone in CEEAC's gradual emergence as a focus for security initiatives in central Africa. Though security structures are still evolving, and observers inside and outside the organization voice frustration at the pace of progress, CEEAC has so far avoided major missteps and racked up some modest accomplishments. CEEAC's relations with regional heads of state and its two major donors--France and the EU--are generally on sound footing, and its status as the key regional partner for AU security initiatives seems secure. These are early days for the still-evolving organization, however, and there are tough challenges ahead. End Summary.

CEEAC Activities

¶2. (U) Formally in existence since 1983, CEEAC was dormant for much of the 1990s because of endemic insecurity in many of its member states. Since then, regional leaders have effectively re-launched the organization and directed its focus toward security issues. Following is a quick overview of CEEAC's current role and future plans.

MICOPAX--Peacekeeping in
the Central African Republic

¶3. (U) CEEAC's takeover of the EU-funded peacekeeping force in CAR represents a major expansion in the organization's responsibilities (Ref. A). The takeover also coincides with actual and planned changes in the force's name, commander, mandate and composition.

¶4. (U) "FOMUC" (for the "Central African Multinational Force") was established in 2002 to help stabilize the wobbly regime of then-President Ange-Felix Patasse. After Patasse's

overthrow by current president Francois Bozize in 2003, the peacekeeping operation continued in largely the same form until today: about 500 troops, a majority of them Gabonese, under a Gabonese commander, with salaries and others costs covered by the EU and logistical and material support (including weapons) provided by France.

¶ 15. (C) Concurrent with the handover to CEEAC, FOMUC has been re-named MICOPAX and placed under the overall command of Congolese Vice-Admiral Hilaire Mokoko. Command of the force is expected to rotate among CEEAC member states at six-month intervals. At least five countries--Cameroon, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Angola and Chad--are slated to contribute military or police personnel. CEEAC Secretary General Sylvain Goma told CDA August 9 that the force will remain at 500 total personnel through the end of 2008, but after that will grow by about 100 personnel per year until it reaches an overall strength of 800. Such expansion is necessary, Goma emphasized, in order to support an expanded mandate (including greater focus on police functions and support for CAR's efforts at internal reconciliation). More personnel will be particularly critical if CAR holds elections in 2010, Goma added.

¶ 16. (C) While the MICOPAX commander has overall authority for operations, finance, logistics and communications, MICOPAX must coordinate closely with French military forces for logistical and other basic needs. Under an agreement brokered by Gabonese President Omar Bongo in June (Ref. B), parties to CAR's long-running civil conflict have agreed to a ceasefire, cantonment, amnesty and negotiations over power-sharing and the reintegration of rebel forces. Under

this agreement, which is already under significant strain, the MICOPAX commander is also required to work closely with Bongo's personal representative, an ambassadorial-level official based in Bangui.

¶ 17. (C) The transition of MICOPAX to CEEAC control has not been without hiccups. Only days before the handover, the EU secured a written commitment from CEEAC Secretary Goma that the force's mandate, activities and troop levels would not change before the end of 2008. EU officials had urgently sought this commitment to prevent disruption of current financing mechanisms. Senior CEEAC officials also complain that French logistical support has been unreliable, and that such problems have worsened in recent months. General Claude Reglat, commander of French forces in Gabon and a key player in French support to MICOPAX, scoffed at those charges in a brief conversation August 17--though he admitted that conflicting regional demands, such as the February 2008 evacuation of French and other citizens from Chad, have sometimes impacted French support for FOMUC/MICOPAX.

Standby Brigade

¶ 18. (C) Separate from the CAR peacekeeping operation, CEEAC is leading efforts to create an AU-sanctioned regional standby brigade for Central Africa--one of five standby brigades the AU hopes to establish across the continent. Starting in 2003, CEEAC has slowly worked out a command structure and identified units for a brigade totaling 4800 personnel from all nine CEEAC member states (Angola, Burundi, CAR, Cameroon, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon). CEEAC's initial focus, however, will be assembling a mixed force of 1200-1600 persons according to Secretary General Goma.

¶ 19. (C) Under an ambitious plan adopted in Libreville in February, each member state is to provide 10 military observers to the standby brigade. Angola is to provide two IL-76 aircraft and Congo-Brazzaville one. Cameroon, Chad and Gabon have each pledged a C-130. DRC also pledged to contribute an as-yet-unidentified transport airplane. Angola pledged three helicopters. Peacekeeping infantry battalions (whose precise troop levels are not specified) are pledged by

Angola, Burundi, Equatorial Guinea, CAR, DRC and Chad. Other pledges include police units from Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, CAR and DRC. Chad pledged a company of camel-borne troops and Gabon pledged a field hospital unit.

¶10. (C) CEEAC officials admit privately that member states are far from meeting these commitments. However, they point to "Operation Bahr-el Ghazal" in eastern Chad in November 2007 as a significant step forward in the development of multi-national interoperability within CEEAC and CEEAC's organization of a regional standby force. In that exercise, member states managed to project 1600 military personnel into a harsh and remote environment for a three-day program that included airborne (parachute) operations, field medical assistance, and civil-military activities. The Gabonese general who co-directed the exercise said that despite difficulties, particularly with communications equipment, the overall effort was a success and "reinforced the spirit of comradeship." The next such large-scale training exercise is planned for 2010 in Angola.

¶11. (C) Overall, CEEAC officials acknowledge that a standby "brigade" or even a smaller multi-national force, dispersed in country-specific units across several member states, needs significantly more joint training to be fully operational. Officials also cite weak transportation infrastructure across the region and limited airlift and other transport capability as major obstacles to the deployment and effectiveness of the brigade.

The General Staff and CEEAC
Headquarters Activities

¶12. (U) CEEAC has a small military general staff--currently about 15 total persons--based in Libreville under the command of General Guy-Pierre Garcia of Congo-Brazzaville. The general staff has primary responsibility for oversight of MICOPAX, the standby brigade and other CEEAC security initiatives. Operating from a refurbished building donated by Gabon, the general staff has received vehicles, computers, communications equipment and furniture through various EU and French assistance programs.

¶13. (C) Gen. Garcia told CDA August 13 that the Government of Cameroon has donated a warehouse to CEEAC for the stockpiling of defense and humanitarian material. The warehouse, at a military airstrip near Douala's commercial airport (NFI), needs refurbishment and is currently empty, Garcia reported. He admitted that CEEAC lacks both personnel and expertise to operate the depot, and made a pitch for training and other assistance. Garcia also pointed out that the general staff has no reliable communications with MICOPAX in CAR, and currently relies either on French assistance or a faulty internet connection.

¶14. (C) CEEAC is working to overcome these limitations, with particular focus on improved communications, Garcia claimed. He added that CEEAC is also attempting to attract resources for "centers of excellence" for the training of military personnel. In each case, Garcia said, CEEAC is attempting to make better use of existing facilities in member states. Strategic, senior-level training can be carried out at an institution ("CSID") in Yaounde, Garcia reported, and "tactical" training--he cited demining--could take place in Angola. Engineering instruction should take place in Brazzaville, he said, and medical training is planned for Gabon.

Civilian Control

¶15. (C) Secretary General Goma and other senior officials also delineated CEEAC's complex structure for civilian control of military activities. Peacekeeping and other

forces in the field report to their commanders, who report to the CEEAC chief of general staff (though field commanders also communicate regularly with other officials). The chief of staff reports to CEEAC's deputy secretary general for peace and security, who reports to the secretary general.

¶116. (C) Although CEEAC has absorbed the "Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa" (COPAX), CEEAC is still bound by a 2000 protocol defining COPAX's authority and establishing a hierarchy of additional structures providing political guidance and overall policy direction to CEEAC's military components. These structures include a Defense and Security Commission of senior military and police officials from member states, which meets periodically at the request of CEEAC's Council of Ministers (generally representing the foreign affairs, defense and interior ministries of member states). The Defense and Security Commission provides advice to the Council of Ministers, which either reaches a consensus decision on key policy questions or passes issues forward for further review and ratification at periodic meetings of CEEAC heads of state.

Analytic Capability

¶117. (C) Also at the headquarters level, CEEAC operates a small conflict early warning mechanism ("MARAC", or the Mecanism d'Alerte Rapide d'Afrique Centrale) with the broad mission of identifying any situation likely to constitute a threat to peace in the region. MARAC, which receives financial backing and technical assistance from the EU, has an "accent on strategic planning" according to Secretary General Goma. MARAC also has responsibility for synthesizing information collected from both open and "paid" sources, according to CEEAC public documents. MARAC works closely with a newly-created pol/mil department ("DAPD", or the Direction des Actions Politique et Diplomatique), which is responsible for non-military aspects of regional crises, including conflict prevention, mediation efforts, and post-conflict and reconstruction support.

Donor Relations and Accountability

¶118. (C) CEEAC officials acknowledge that their modest achievements to date would not have been possible without support from France and the EU. Both have a history of engagement with CEEAC that predates the CEEAC's assumption of peacekeeping duties in CAR. In addition to the French/EU finance and administration cell attached to MICOPAX in Bangui, the EU has a three-person team attached to the CEEAC secretariat which oversee financial and material assistance at the headquarters level. This cell is backed up by staff at the European Commission office in Libreville. More recently, the EU has channeled some support for CEEAC and the regional standby brigade through the African Union in Addis Ababa. A joint EU/AU team of accountants and other professionals travels to Libreville quarterly to monitor that assistance. EU assistance is set out in at least one formal MOU with CEEAC, while agreement(s) governing French support to MICOPAX appear to be less formalized--and confidential.

¶119. (C) CEEAC Secretary General Goma claims that French and EU partners are satisfied with the relationship, a view generally confirmed by representatives on the ground in Libreville. The stringent accountability arrangements, however, reflect well-founded concern over corruption and other malfeasance in CEEAC member states, if not in the organization itself. According to French General Reglat, control of lethal and non-lethal defense articles provided to MICOPAX is under particularly tight control. Such articles remain technically the property of France, he emphasized, and the finance and administration cell closely tracks their use and their ultimate return to French/EU stores.

Political Will

¶20. (C) CEEAC's peace and security mechanisms have emerged slowly, after seemingly endless rounds of meetings among military and security officials; ministers of defense, interior and foreign affairs; and heads of state. Key heads of state, like Chad's Idriss Deby, have expressed public skepticism about CEEAC's role in crises. Rwanda, disenchanted with France and its francophone allies, withdrew from CEEAC in 2001 and Burundi, though still a participant, is pursuing closer ties to the East African Community. In a comment to the Ambassador shortly before assuming his duties as Chair of the AU last year, former Gabonese Foreign Minister Jean Ping said that a major shortcoming of CEEAC was that two of its key members--Angola and DRC--were "looking south" toward membership in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Nevertheless, member states have provided personnel, equipment and some financial resources to key initiatives like MICOPAX and the standby brigade. CEEAC has also provided a platform for regional diplomatic efforts to bring peace and political reconciliation to CAR and resuscitate the latest peace agreement between Sudan and Chad.

Comment

¶21. (C) CEEAC's ambitions in the realm of peace and security significantly exceed currently available resources, and some of its plans should probably be scaled back. The weakest of Africa's major regional organizations, CEEAC has nevertheless made a real start towards creating structures to prevent and respond to conflict. CEEAC's assumption of responsibility for the MICOPAX peacekeeping operation in CAR will be a major test of its capacity. So too will efforts to create a standby brigade. French and EU assistance has been essential, and more help from other quarters--including the United States--could be put to good use with proper safeguards. CEEAC's ability to develop into an effective regional organization, however, is most dependent on the political will of regional heads of state. It is their recognition of the costs of conflict, more than statesmanship or high-minded commitment to regional cooperation, that has created the modest momentum that CEEAC now enjoys. End Comment.

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